



The Mysterious Doctor Rurk and His Eponymous Catskink, *Ristella rurkii* Gray 1839 (Squamata: Scincidae: Lygosominae: Ristellini) with Notes on Other Collectors for the Museum of the Army Medical Service at Chatham

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Abstract: *Ristella rurkii*, although stated originally to be named after a “Dr Rurk”, was likely named after Dr William Augustus Burke, the first Inspector-General of Hospitals in India, who collected for the Museum of the Army Medical Service at Fort Pitt, Chatham. Burke was mostly based in north India, corresponding to the type locality of *R. rurkii*, and to the localities for his bird collections. However, the skink is only known from the Western Ghats of far southern India. With the type no longer extant, a neotype is designated to stabilise nomenclature. Known natural history collectors for the Fort Pitt Museum, along with their British Army service postings, are tabulated.

In the fourth and final part of his “Catalogue of the Slender-tongued Saurians”, John Edward Gray of the British Museum described a new genus and species of skink, *Ristella rurkii*, from material in the Chatham Museum, stated to be from “North India” with donor “Dr Rurk” (Gray, 1839; see also Beolens et al., 2011). The description was repeated in German translation five years later (Gray, 1844). Despite this initial stated type locality, the species name has consistently been assigned to a small skink species with restricted distribution in the Western Ghats of southern India (Gray, 1845; Günther, 1875; Boulenger, 1887, 1890; Hora, 1927; Roux, 1928; Smith, 1935; Sharma, 2002; Venugopal, 2010; Palot, 2015; Ganesh, 2018). In an attempt to resolve this apparent discrepancy, I tried to identify the mysterious Dr Rurk.

Rurk is an unusual surname, and not one that has been used in combination with someone in the medical profession. The “Chatham Museum” cited by Gray was the Museum of the Army Medical Service at Fort Pitt, Chatham, now disbanded (hereafter referred to as the Fort Pitt Museum). This was primarily a teaching collection established in 1816 as part of the Army Medical Service Hospital, and was housed in a small building within Fort Pitt at Chatham (Fig. 1). Medical graduates in the British Army were asked to send natural history and medical specimens to Chatham to develop a teaching collection for training new generations of army surgeons (Anon, 1833; Burton, 1838). Hence, it must be assumed that Dr Rurk was an army surgeon, or some other member of the Army Medical Service.

However, no member of the Army Medical Service with surname Rurk is listed in the detailed catalogue of the Service by Johnston (1917), suggesting that Gray may have mis-spelt the name in his description. Gray was notoriously poor with details in his published papers. Among numerous inconsistencies, Gray (1841) spelt the name of Dr John Mair (another donor to the Chatham collection) as “Maw” and “Mann” as well as the correct Mair. Scientific names applied by him to species also varied between and within papers, with the Australian agamid genus *Chelosania* Gray, 1845 also being spelt *Chelasonia* in the same monograph, and later spelt *Chelonasia* by Gray (1867). The Australian pygopod lizard originally described by Gray (1835) as *Lialis burtonis* was afterwards spelt by him as *Lialis burtonii* (Gray, 1841, 1867) and *Lialis burtoni* (Gray, 1842, 1845).

A thorough search through Johnston’s (1917) list identified the most likely misspelling as being for Dr William Augustus Burke, the first Inspector-General of Hospitals in India.

Another line of exploration is the listing of donors of birds and mammals in the published catalogue of those parts of the Fort Pitt Museum (Burton, 1838). A total of 67 donors are listed there (Table 1), of which 21 served in India. Most of these (13) were based in Madras Presidency, which could be considered the equivalent of “South India” (Table 1): Pasquale-Maria Benza, Robert Davis, John Hutchison, Lewis Leslie, Thomas Lewis, Patrick McKie, Donald McLeod, William Milligan, Alexander Morgan, James Mouat, Samuel Roe,

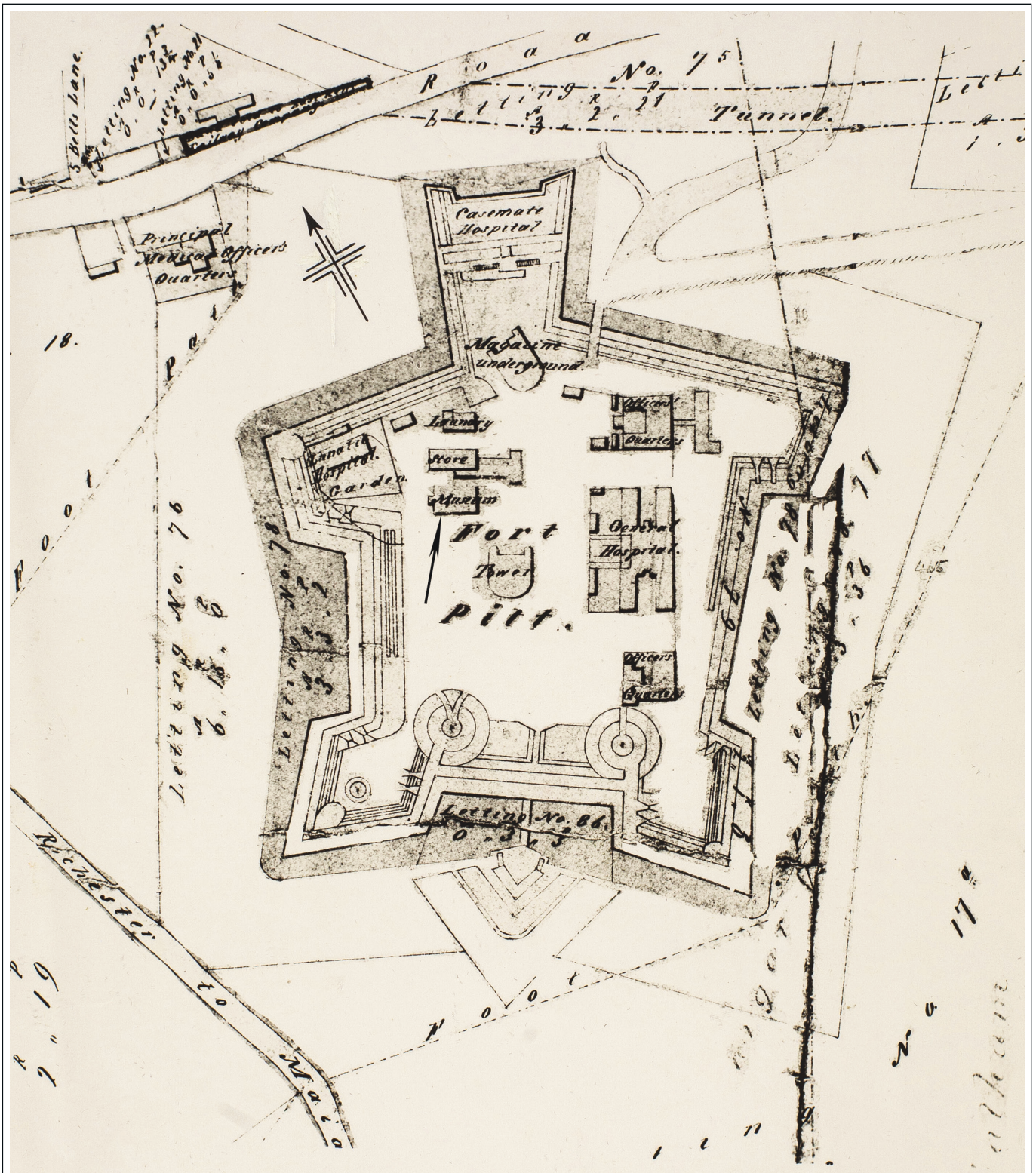


Fig. 1. Schema of Fort Pitt, Chatham, with the position of the Museum marked with an arrow. Image from Wellcome Collection: "Collection re the history of Fort Pitt, Chatham, and the Army Medical School", available at <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/r5q6nj92/items?canvas=7>.

Archibald Shanks and James Strachan. Seven were based in Bengal Presidency, which could be considered "North India"): Burke, J.F. Bacon, Duncan Menzies, Backshall Lane

Sandham, Robert Stevenson, William Ramsay White, plus Hutchinson. Four served in Bombay Presidency, in between the two in latitude, but on the west coast: William Jones,

Table 1. Collectors/donors of birds and mammals to the Fort Pitt Museum, Chatham. Details of people listed by Burton (1838) obtained from Johnston (1917) and annual Army Lists. Places of assignment are based on regimental histories (Anon 1868, 1870, 2008; Bannatyne, 1923; Brinckman, 1888; Brodigan, 1884; Burgoyne, 1883; Cannon, 1839a-c, 1841, 1842a-c, 1845, 1848a-e, 1849a-b, 1850, 1853; Cooper, 2004; Dalbiac, 1902; De Ainslie, 1887; Dyde, 1997; Freer, 1915; Fyler, 1895; Hayden, 1908; James, 1906; Jameson, 1863; Moorsam, 1860; Slack, 1884; Smythies, 1894; Sutherland, 1972; Swiney, 1893; Trimble, 1876; Wallace, 1879; Witting, 1878; Wylly, 1926), and annual Army Lists for General Staff positions. Year of death is given for those listed by Burton as deceased. Abbreviations: AIH – Assistant Inspector of Hospitals; AS – Assistant Surgeon; ASS – Staff Assistant Surgeon (“Assistant Surgeon to the Forces”); BMH – Bengal Medical Establishment; DGA – Director-General of Army Medical Department; DGIH – Deputy Inspector General of Hospitals; DIH – Deputy Inspector of Hospitals; IGH – Inspector General of Hospitals; PGN – Physician-General to the Navy; S – Surgeon; SS – Staff Surgeon (“Surgeon to the Forces”). Donors based in India in 1838 or before are in bold.

NAME/AFFILIATION IN BURTON (1838)	FULL NAME	RANK AMONG BIRD DONORS	RANK AMONG MAMMAL DONORS	POSTINGS PRIOR TO 1838
Dr Burke, IGH	William Augustus Burke	1	9	1796 Gibraltar (37th Regt); 1800 West Indies (37th Regt); 1811 Mauritius (DIH); 1825 India (Bengal) [d.1837, Calcutta]
Mr Leslie, AS, 45th Regt	Lewis Leslie	2		1826 Myanmar; 1830 India (Madras) [d.1834]
Sir James McGrigor, DGA	Sir James McGrigor	3		1815 England
Dr McLeod, IGH	Donald McLeod	4	4	1827 Australia (Sydney); 1829 India (Bombay); 1834 India (Madras)
Mr Bacon, Bengal Medical Establishment	?J.F. Bacon	5		India (Bengal)
Mr Munro, ASF	John Munro	6	3	1820 Canada; 1830 England; 1832 South Africa (Cape of Good Hope)
Mr Wyer, S, 19th Regt	John Wyer	7	8	1824 England (Isle of Wight, ASS); 1825 South Africa (Cape of Good Hope, ASS); 1831 England (Chatham, ASS); 1832 Canada (79th Regt); 1835 West Indies; 1836 Ireland
Mr Dumoulin, S, 50th Regt	James Andrew Du Moulin	8	21	1834 Australia (Sydney, Norfolk I, Tasmania)
Mr Morgan, AS, 55th Regt	Alexander Braithwaite Morgan	9		1825 South Africa; 1830 India (Madras)
Mr McGrigor Pink, Quebec	McGrigor Pink (son of John Freeborn Pink, S, Royal Newfoundland Veteran Companies)	10		1826 Canada (Quebec) – father was apothecary 1826, ASS 1831 in Quebec; S, RNVC 1837. McGrigor (b. 1814) was between 12 and 22 during the period his father was based in Quebec and presumably stayed there when his father was posted to Nova Scotia with the Veteran Companies.
Professor Jameson, Edinburgh	Professor Robert Jameson	11		Non-army; Scotland (University of Edinburgh)
Lady McGrigor	Lady Mary McGrigor, wife of Sir James	12		1810 England
Dr Skey, DGIH	Joseph Skey	13	17	1824 England (Chatham); 1830 Canada
Dr Gibson, New South Wales	Andrew Gibson	14	11	non-army; 1826 Australia (Sydney)
Mr Ford, AS, 72nd Regt	William Michael Ford	15		1827 Portugal (ASS); 1829 South Africa
Dr Shanks, S, 55th Regt	Archibald Shanks	16	19	1822 Mauritius (82nd Regt); 1835 India (Madras)
Mr Davidson, AS, 21st Regt	James Davidson	17		1825 West Indies; 1827 England/Ireland; 1833 Australia (Sydney, Tasmania)

NAME/AFFILIATION IN BURTON (1838)	FULL NAME	RANK AMONG BIRD DONORS	RANK AMONG MAMMAL DONORS	POSTINGS PRIOR TO 1838
Dr Stevenson, S, 3rd Regt	Robert Stevenson	18		1834 India (Bengal)
Mr Seaton, S, Chatham	Thomas Seaton	19		1813 England (Chatham, Ordnance Medical Dept)
Dr Lewis, S, 4th Regt	Thomas Lewis	20		1826 Corfu (18th Regt); 1830 England; 1832 Australia (various); 1837 India (Madras)
Dr Milligan, AS, 63rd Regt	William Milligan	21		1829 Australia (Sydney, Tasmania, West Australia); 1834 India (Madras)
Major-General Sir Lewis Grant	Sir Lewis Grant	22		1820 Bahamas (Governor); 1829 Trinidad (Governor)
Dr Mair, AS, 59th Regt	John Mair	23		1823 South Africa (Cape of Good Hope); 1828 Australia (Sydney, 39th Regt); 1833 England; 1836 Malta
Dr Davis, AS, 39th Regt	Robert Martin Davis	24		1825 Australia (Sydney, Tasmania, West Australia); 1832 India (Madras)
Dr John Arthur, DIGH	John Arthur	25	2	1818 West Indies (S, 60th Regt); 1825 South Africa (Cape of Good Hope); 1829 unassigned; 1836 Australia (Hobart)
Mr Burton, SS	Edward Burton	26	15	1813 Ireland (ASS, 12th Regt); 1818 England/Ireland (9th Lancers); 1826 England (Chatham)
Mr G McGrigor, AS, 50th Regt	Grigor McGrigor	27		1834 Australia (Sydney) [d.1835, Hobart]
Mr John Stewart, ASS	John Stewart	28		1834 Greece (Corfu)
Mr Parry, S, 1st Dragoon Guards	William Parry	29		1822 West Indies (4th Regt); 1828 England (4th Regt); 1832 Australia (4th Regt)
Mr Fraser, S, 60th Regt	Hugh Fraser	30	29	1825 Gibraltar (ASS); 1831 England (Chatham, ASS); 1833 Canada (ASS); 1835 Mediterranean
Mr McBride, Medical Staff, Jamaica	Michael McBride (Dispenser)	31		1827 Jamaica
Mr Menzies, AS, 16th Regt	Duncan Menzies	32	24	1830 Sierra Leone (ASS); 1833 India (Bengal)
Mr Hall, ASS	Andrew Halliday Hall	33		1836 Sri Lanka
Mr Chambers, S, 22nd Regt.	John Chambers	34	22	1824 Gibraltar (64th Regt); 1827 Ireland (64th Regt); 1834 Jamaica (64th Regt); 1837 Ireland
Dr Benza, Madras Medical Dept	Pasquale-Maria Benza	35	5	1826 Greece (Corfu, ASS); 1829 left army; 1837 India (Madras)
Mr Poole, AS, 32nd Regt	Richard Poole	36		1827 West Indies (27th Regt); 1830 Canada
Dr Baxter, IGH	Alexander Baxter	37		1818 St Helena; 1825 Canada (Nova Scotia); 1829 Barbados
Dr Mouatt, S, 13th Light Dragoons	James Mouat	38		1827 India (Madras) (14th Regt); 1829 India (Madras)

NAME/AFFILIATION IN BURTON (1838)	FULL NAME	RANK AMONG BIRD DONORS	RANK AMONG MAMMAL DONORS	POSTINGS PRIOR TO 1838
Dr Carter, ASS	John Collis Carter	39		1826 Canada (Nova Scotia); 1833 Barbados; 1836 Tobago
Mr Rolland, ASS	James Henderson Rolland	40		1830 England (Chatham, ASS); 1832 Australia (Sydney; 4th Regt); 1836 England (Chatham)
Mr Loinsworth, SS	Augustus Lewis Loinsworth	41		1823 West Indies; 1824 Trinidad, 1826 Demerara; 1828 Scotland (Glasgow); 1831 England (Bristol); 1836 Sri Lanka; 1837 India (Bombay)
Dr J. Clark, DIGH	John Clark	42		1822 England (Isle of Wight; AIH); 1827 England (Chatham)
Philosophical Inst. Chatham		43		
Dr Andrew Smith, SS	Sir Andrew Smith	44	6	1826 South Africa (Cape of Good Hope); 1837 England (Chatham)
Staff Sergeant Wells, Fort Pitt	?	45		England (Chatham)
Dr Jones, S, 40th Regt	William Jones	46		1823 Australia (Sydney, Tasmania); 1828 India (Bombay)
Captain McKay, 3rd Regt	Patrick McKie	47		1824 Burma (89th Regt); 1826 India (Madras, 89th Regt); 1827 (Madras)
Major-General Sir Leonard Greenwell	Sir Leonard Greenwell	48		1819 Sri Lanka (45th Regt); 1831 England (Chatham, Commandant)
Sir William Burnett, PGN	Sir William Burnett	49		1822 England (presumably linked through his establishment of the Melville Hospital, a naval hospital at Chatham, in 1828)
Rev Aylmer Farquhar	Rev Aylmer Farquhar	50		non-army; England (Rochester); [d.1835]. Connections via christening at Chatham; half-brother, Major-General William Farquhar.
Mr Edmonstone, AS, 30th Regt	Joseph Edmonson	51	30	1830 Barbados (ASS); 1832 Antigua (93rd Regt); 1834 Bermuda
William Swainson	William Swainson	52		non-army naturalist; 1806 Brazil; 1818 England
Dr Davy, AIH	John Davy	53		1818 Sri Lanka; 1824 Malta; 1826 Greece (Corfu); 1829 Malta; 1835 England (Chatham)
Dr Kinnis, ASS	John Kinnis		1	1825 England (Isle of Wight); 1826 Canada (Nova Scotia); 1827 Canada (Quebec); 1829 Sri Lanka
Mr Allman, Apothecary to the Forces	George Allmann		7	1829 Sierra Leone; 1830 Gibraltar; 1831 Jamaica
Dr Dyce, Aberdeen	Robert Dyce		10	non-army; 1824 Mauritius; 1830 South Africa; 1835 Scotland (Aberdeen)
Mr White, S, 16th Lancers	William Ramsay White		12	1825 India (Bengal, 31st Regt); 1830 India (Bengal)
Mr Draper, IGH	Thomas Draper		13	1825 Barbados; 1826 Demerara; 1829 Jamaica
Mr Hutchinson, AS, 11th Light Dragoons	John Hutchison		14	1817 Trinidad (3rd West India Regt); 1827 England (62nd Regt); 1830 India (Madras, 62nd Regt); 1835 India (Bengal)
Dr Burrell, S, 76th Regt	William Henry Burrell		16	1827 England/Scotland (72nd Regt); 1831 Gibraltar (94th Regt); 1832 Malta (94th Regt); 1834 Malta (ASS); 1836 England (ASS); 1837 Malta

NAME/AFFILIATION IN BURTON (1838)	FULL NAME	RANK AMONG BIRD DONORS	RANK AMONG MAMMAL DONORS	POSTINGS PRIOR TO 1838
Dr Strachan, IGH	James Strachan		18	1827 India (Bombay); 1829 India (Madras); retired 1834
Dr Roe, S, 38th Regt	Samuel Crozier Roe		20	1819 England/Ireland (28th Foot); 1826 Mauritius (28th Foot); 1832 India (Madras)
Dr Athill, ASS	Robert Atthill		23	1837 Jamaica
Mr White, S, Rifle Brigade	Moses White		25	1826 Barbados; 1827 Scotland (Edinburgh); 1828 Greece (Corfu); 1829 Malta; 1831 England
Dr Barry, S, 89th Regt	Samuel Barry		26	1825 Ireland/England (1st Dragoons); 1833 Ireland (7th Dragoon Guards); 1835 West Indies [d 1837, Portsmouth)
Dr J. F. Clarke, AIH	John Frederick Clarke		27	1821 Ionian Islands (ASS, 51st Regt); 1827 Sierra Leone (SS); 1830 hp; 1836 Malta
Dr Sandham, S, 11th Light Dragoons	Backshall Lane Sandham		28	1820 India (Bengal)

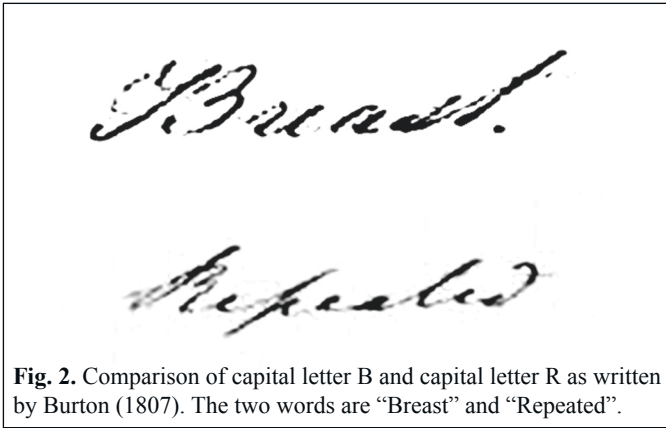


Fig. 2. Comparison of capital letter B and capital letter R as written by Burton (1807). The two words are “Breast” and “Repeated”.

Augustus Lewis Loinsworth, plus McLeod and Strachan who were also in Madras. Only Burke has a name vaguely similar to “Rurk”.

Burke was listed first in terms of numbers among the donors of birds to the collection, and ninth in terms of the number of mammals in the collection (Burton, 1838). He is also recorded as a significant donor in the first catalogue of the collection (Morbidity, Natural and Comparative Anatomy, Anon, 1833), and was also listed as a donor of specimens in the annual report of the previous year (Anon, 1832, for the year between May 1831 and May 1832). A large collection of Burke’s birds was reported on by Edward Burton, the curator of the natural history collections at Fort Pitt Museum between its foundation in 1816 (Anon, 1833; Burton, 1838) and 1837. Burton (1836) specifically noted that Burke was the donor of the collection of birds described in his paper, and that he “has enriched the Museum with an extensive collection in ornithology from Northern India”; from among them, he described a new species of warbler *Sylvia burkii* (now *Phylloscopus burkii*). Burton’s paper was read at a meeting of the Zoological Society of 27 October 1835, so Burke’s Himalayan bird specimens arrived at Chatham by then.

Hence, with Burke a major donor of specimens to the collection, and his collections being largely, if not entirely, from North India, the stated type locality for *Ristella rurkii*, it would seem that Gray’s “Dr Rurk” is most likely a misspelling of “Dr Burke”.

It is likely that Gray examined the Chatham collection in 1834, while Burton was still the curator. Gray’s (1839) description is silent (even uncertain) as to the scalation of his new taxon, stating “head shields —?”, suggesting he no longer had the specimen available to him for examination at the time of writing. There is a record in the volume “Trustees Manuscripts Donations 1823–1836, Volume 2” held in the library of the Department of Herpetology at the Natural History Museum of the United Kingdom (formerly the British Museum (Natural History), and prior to that part of the British Museum; BMNH) of the receipt on 13 December 1834 of 76 specimens of reptiles from the Army Medical Officers at Chatham. There is no subsequent trace of any specimens in the Natural History Museum from the Fort Pitt collection,

or from any of the donors to the Fort Pitt collection listed by Burton (1838), in catalogues of the British Museum herpetological collections published over the next 25 years (Gray, 1845; Günther, 1858), other than one specimen of *Pygopus squamiceps* Gray, 1845 (now *Pygopus lepidopodus* (Lacépède, 1804) from Australia donated by Dr Mair (Gray, 1845) and one specimen of *Leptodeira rufescens* (Gmelin, 1789) (now *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia* (Laurenti, 1768)) from the Cape of Good Hope donated by Dr Dyce (Günther, 1858). This suggests that the collection of 76 specimens was subsequently returned to the Fort Pitt collection after identification. Further evidence for the retention of the types of the species described by Gray (1839) at Chatham comes from a comment made by Gray (1845: 100) relating to the species he named as *Dorfia punctata* in the earlier paper: “I have placed *Dorfia* in this genus, until I can again examine the specimen”.

Edward Burton (1790–11 March 1867), who retired on 15 September 1837, was immediately replaced as curator of the Fort Pitt collection by Sir Andrew Smith (Anon, 1837). Burton would presumably have provided the labelling on the jars in the collection at the time of Gray’s examination of the reptiles. His handwriting is preserved in a set of notes he wrote recording surgical lectures by Sir Everard Home in 1807, notes that were formerly in the collection of the Fort Pitt Museum, and are now in the Wellcome Collection (Burton, 1807). Burton’s written “B” is similar to his written “R” (Fig. 2), and hence it is possible that Gray could easily have either mis-transcribed the spelling of Burke as Rurk/Rurk, or misread his own notes subsequently. With the changeover of staff at the Fort Pitt Museum in the period 1837–1838, it is quite possible that Gray did not bother to confirm the spelling before writing his 1839 paper.

William Augustus Burke was born in or near 1769, one of three sons of Walter Burke, purser aboard H.M.S. *Victory*, Admiral Horatio Nelson’s flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar, and reputedly the person who held the dying Nelson (Beatty, 1807).

William first entered the Army as a Hospital Mate on September 13, 1795, aged 26, and was appointed Surgeon en Second to the 37th Regiment of Foot on 24 October 1795, then promoted to Surgeon on 15 November 1797 (Anon, 1797; Johnston, 1917).

During the period 1796 to 1799, the Regiment was stationed at Gibraltar (Whitting, 1878). While there, Burke was sent by the Gibraltar Governor, General Charles O’Hara, to attend the Emperor of Morocco as Physician (Holmes & Co., 1851). His memorial tablet in Rochester Cathedral also mentions service in Sicily, which presumably occurred before the regiment left Gibraltar.

In 1800, the 37th Regiment was transferred to the West Indies (Whitting, 1878), where Burke was promoted to Apothecary to the Forces on 7 September 1801, a promotion formalised in London on 26 January 1802 (Anon, 1802), followed by further promotion to Surgeon to the Garrison of Barbados (locally 5 May 1803, formalised 10 September; Anon, 1803),

then Deputy Inspector of Hospitals to the Windward and Leeward Charibbee Islands [sic; Caribbean], an appointment made on 19 July 1804, and formalised on 20 July 1804 (Anon, 1804; Johnston, 1917). On March 11 1809, he was promoted to Brevet Deputy-Inspector of Hospitals (Anon, 1809), a prelude to being transferred to Mauritius in 1811 (Anon, 1811), a colony newly taken by the British from French rule in 1810. Eight years later (17 July 1817, he was further promoted to Brevet Inspector of Hospitals (Anon, 1817, 1851).

While in Mauritius, he was honorary Director of the Botanic Gardens at Pamplemousse (Owadally, 1972), and it is likely that the catalogue of exotic plants in the garden there, lacking authorship (Anon, 1816) was by his hand. In August 1818, he is reported to have accompanied the missionaries David Jones and Thomas Bevan to Tamatave in Madagascar, as they established a mission there (Campbell, 2012, 2022). Burke was in Mauritius, prior to his visit to Madagascar, at the time of the visit of Louis de Freycinet's expedition aboard the *Uranie*, between 5 May and 16 July 1818, and one of the naturalists of that expedition, Paul Gaimard, mentions him on several occasions during his visit, in his unpublished diary (Gaimard, 2019). Gaimard mentions being shown around the Botanic Gardens by Burke on 12 June, a meeting with Burke and another local doctor on 19 June, Burke's interest in Gaimard's craniometric measurements on Mauritian residents, along with gifts of a mineral specimen and a copy of the catalogue of the gardens on 11 July, and on 14 July, Burke hosted Gaimard at lunch, and showed him "some beautiful coloured drawings of butterflies and fish of Mauritius, anatomical specimens, two recent cases of pericarditis, a Madagascar chameleon, crustaceans and fish, all preserved in alcohol; he has had built a shed in his garden that he plans to use for anatomical demonstrations." The breadth of Burke's natural history interests is evident.

Burke was also involved in reform of prison conditions (Anderson, 2008) and in control of the 1819 cholera outbreak (Anon, 1820) and leprosy (Anderson, 2000).

He left the position of Inspector of Hospitals in Mauritius on 25 September 1822, replaced by John McMullin (Anon, 1823; Johnston, 1917), and was placed on the half-pay roll until 23 December 1824, when he was returned to full pay (Anon, 1825a), becoming Inspector of Hospitals in India on 20 January 1825 (Anon, 1825b).

During the two years he was on the half-pay list, his activities are not recorded, although one obituary stated that he moved direct from Mauritius to Bengal (Holmes & Co., 1851).

Burke was the first appointment to the position of Inspector of Hospitals to what was then the East India Station, with headquarters at Fort William in Calcutta in Bengal Presidency (capital now Kolkata), and representation also in Madras Presidency (capital now Chennai) and Bombay Presidency (capital now Mumbai). Five years later, on 29 July 1830, his position became Inspector-General of Hospitals in India (Anon, 1830a, b). Burke died in Calcutta on 22 May 1837 (Holmes and Co., 1851; Buckland, 1906), with his reports on

the mortality of the English at the stations in Bengal Presidency published posthumously (Burke, 1839).

During his 12 years in India, he is most remembered today for his work on the infamous lock hospitals, which attempted to control the spread of venereal disease among the regiments by forcibly incarcerating infected prostitutes. Although initially supporting the lock hospital system, he later rejected their role in controlling disease, providing support for their abolishment by the then-Governor of India, Lord William Bentinck, in 1830 (Peers, 1998).

Burke's movements in India are not well recorded. However, as Inspector-General of Hospitals, the most senior administrative position in the Army Medical Service in India, he was presumably based at the Headquarters of the East India Station in Bengal Presidency. Two published letters from him (Burke, 1829, 1833) have the address Simla (now Shimla, in Himachal Pradesh state, India), the former Summer Headquarters of the Bengal Presidency. This place was used to escape the high temperatures and humidity of the cities on the plains. This matches the topic of the first letter, the consideration of Landour in Uttarakhand Province as a site for a convalescent station due to its altitude and cool climate, and the Himalayan/North Indian localities given for Burke's bird and mammal specimens in the Fort Pitt Museum (Burton, 1836, 1838; Anon, 1833). He was recorded as being present at the capture of Bharatpur in 1826 (Holmes and Co., 1851; Buckland, 1906), again a locality in northern India (Rajasthan state). The position of these localities is provided in Fig. 3.

This leaves unresolved the discrepancy between the North Indian locality for the type of *Ristella rurkii* and the distribution of the species that is restricted to southern India.

One possibility is that Burke, in studying the effects of cool climates on convalescence of ill officers, visited the Western Ghats directly, or obtained material through one of his staff in the area. The most likely source of *Ristella* specimens from the Western Ghats in that time would have been the Nilgiri Hills area. The Nilgiri Hills were proposed as the site for a sanatorium for Madras Presidency in 1827 (preamble to Burke, 1829), and the local Resident Medical officer at Ootacamund (now Udhagamandalam, Tamil Nadu state), Surgeon Haines, was appointed as superintendent, with the first hospital completed in 1830 (Francis, 1908; Price, 1908). A few years later, the Governor of India Lord William Bentinck, suffering from ill-health, spent six months between March and September 1834 at Ootacamund, running the country from that settlement (Price, 1908), with the assistance of the Governor of Madras Presidency, Sir Frederick Adam, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Madras Forces, Sir Robert O'Callaghan. This medical and administrative activity at Ootacamund at a time prior to Burke's death in 1837 would have provided a potential pathway for either Burke to have visited the area, or received specimens from one of his medical staff.

However, *Ristella rurkii*, in the current application of the name, is not known to occur so far north in the Western Ghats. It is presently known only from the Anaimalai and

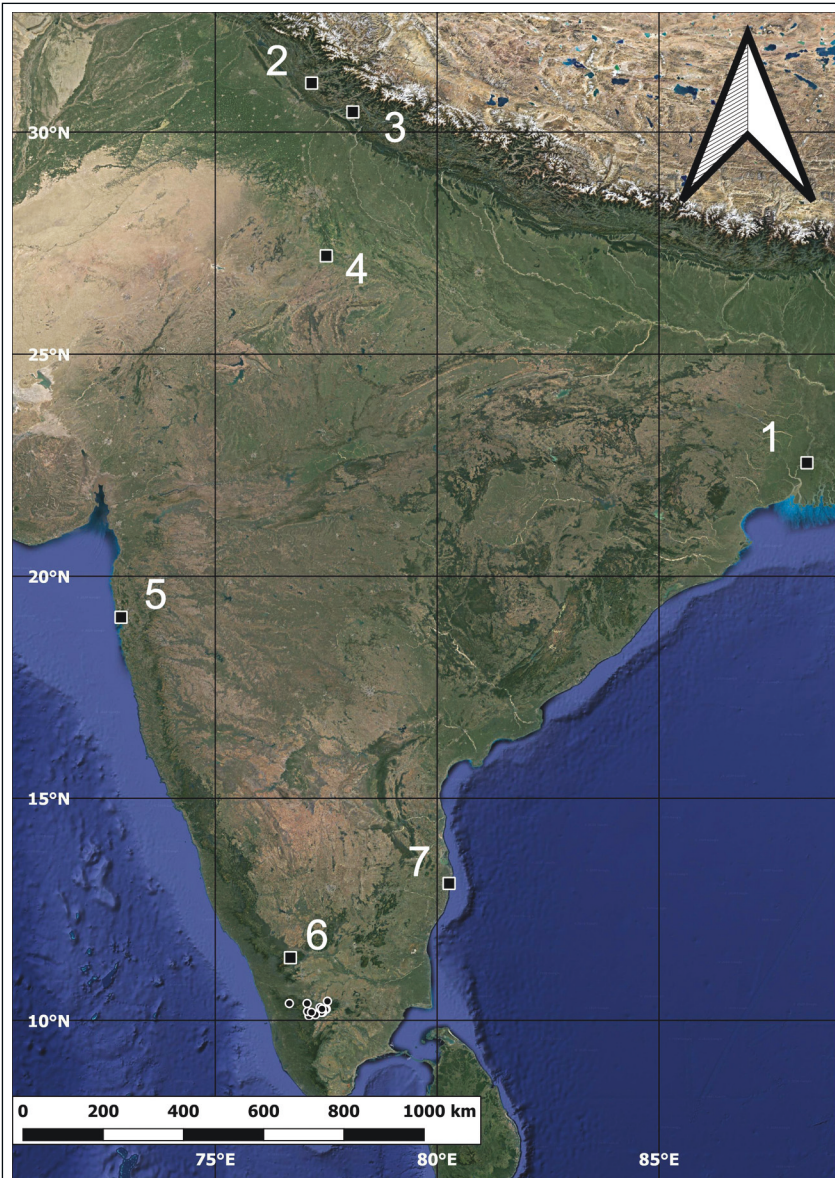


Fig. 3. Known distribution of *Ristella rurkii* (circles) with comparison to localities associated with William Augustus Burke and mentioned in the paper. 1 = Fort William, Calcutta, where Burke was based as head of the medical service for the East India Station; 2 = Shimla (= “Simla”) from where Burke wrote letters, and to where he apparently retreated to escape the oppressive climate at Calcutta; 3 = Landour, where Burke was proposing a convalescent station; 4 = Bharatpur, where Burke as reported present in 1826; 5 = Mumbai (former Bombay) where other medical officers were based; 6 = Udhagamandalum (former Ootacamund), where Lord William Bentinck, Governor of India, spent six month convalescing in 1834; 7 = Chennai (former Madras), where other medical officers were based. Localities for *Ristella rurkii* are based on Roux (1928), Ganesh (2018) and Deuti et al. (2020), specimens in the NHMUK collection, and other specimen records from Vertnet (held in California Academy of Sciences, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard, and Museum National d’Histoire Naturelle, Paris).

Palni Hills, parts of the southern Western Ghats (Ganesh et al., 2018; Deuti et al., 2020), areas which had barely been visited by any British explorer prior to Burke’s death in 1837. Kodaikanal, the largest town in the Palni Hills, was first established in 1845 (Mitchell, 1972), and the Anaimalai Hills were first explored as a potential site for establishment of

another sanatorium in 1858 (Cleghorn, 1862), and with the first settlement by Europeans by John Munro and the Turner brothers, the founders of the North Travancore Land Planting and Agricultural Society, in 1879 (Suresh et al., 2018).

In contrast, *Ristella beddomei* Boulenger, 1887 is known to occur in the Nilgiri Hills (Deuti et al., 2020), raising the possibility that the name *Ristella rurkii*, a species for which the holotype is now lost, has been misapplied.

The description of *Ristella rurkii* by Gray (1839) is brief, and based largely on coloration, reading just “RISTELLA. Toes 4–5, short; ears distinct; head shields — ? *Ristella Rurkii*. Crown and back pale brown, shining; scales 6-rowed, each of four central rows with a blackish central spot, forming four longitudinal series of spots; sides white-dotted; chin and belly white.” The redescription of the species by Gray (1845) is barely more detailed, reading “RISTELLA, Gray. Muzzle conical. Supranasal — ? Ears distinct, suborbicular, sunken. Lower eyelid — ? Body and tail elongate, subcylindrical, the latter tapering at the end. Legs 4, weak, far apart. Toes 4–5, compressed, front very short, hinder unequal. RURK’S RISTELLA. *Ristella Rurkii*. Gray, *Ann. N. H.* ii. 333. Crown and back pale brown, shining; scales 6-rowed, each of those in the 4 central rows with a black central spot, forming 4 longitudinal series of spots; sides ashy, white-dotted; chin and belly white; tail similar, but rather paler, nearly as long as the body.” Neither description gives features that would allow unequivocal distinction of *R. rurkii* from *R. beddomei*. Indeed, neither description gives any features that would confidently allow identification of the species as what is currently a member of the genus *Ristella*, other than the digital formula of four fingers and five toes. Further, the description of the ear opening as “suborbicular, sunken” is suspicious, given that *Ristella* have tiny ear openings, partly covered by the large anterior scales.

Gray (1839) placed *Ristella* among a series of eight genera that were grouped together on the basis of the suite of characters “muzzle rounded; body subcylindrical, elongate; limbs 4, far apart”. These genera were *Riopa* Gray, 1839, including the species *R. punctata* (Gray, 1831) (now *Riopa punctata* (Linnaeus, 1758)), *R. ruppellii* Gray, 1839 (now *Ablepharus ruppellii*) and *R. Brougainvillii* Gray, 1839 (now *Lerista brougainvillii* (Gray, 1839)); *Lygosoma* Hardwicke and Gray, 1827, including the species *L. abdominalis* (Thunberg, 1787)

(now *Lygosoma quadrupes* (Linnaeus, 1766)) and *L. australis* Gray, 1839 (now *Hemiergis gracilipes* (Steindachner, 1870)); *Chiamela* Gray 1839, including the species *C. lineata* Gray, 1839 (now *Riopa lineata*) and *C. duvaucellii* Gray, 1839 (now *Hemiergis peronii* (Gray, 1831)); *Tetradactylus* Cuvier, 1829, a monotypic genus for *Te. decresiensis* Cuvier, 1829 (now *Hemiergis peronii* (Gray, 1831)); *Hagria* Gray, a monotypic genus for *H. vosmaerii* Gray, 1839 (now *Riopa vosmaerii*), *Tridactylus* Cuvier, 1829, a monotypic genus for *Tr. decresiensis* Cuvier, 1829 (now *Hemiergis decresiensis*), *Seps* Merrem, 1820, including the species *S. tridactylus* (Laurenti, 1768), (now *Chalcides chalcides* (Linnaeus, 1758)), *S. vittata* (Leuckart, 1828) (likewise now *Chalcides chalcides*) and *S. multivirgatus* Boie (a nomen nudum), and *Siaphos* Gray, 1839, a monotypic genus for *S. equalis* (Gray, 1825). All of these species are very elongate skinks with very widely separated short limbs, much more so than any species of *Ristella*.

This further raises the possibility that the *Ristella rurkii* was originally based on a specimen not even congeneric with the current application of the name, and that hence Burke's original locality of North India may indeed be correct. In the absence of the holotype, the only character states available to determine the original application of the name are the very elongate body and short limbs, with four fingers and five toes. However, there are no elongate skinks with widely spaced, short limbs, but four fingers and five toes, in North India. The Indian species formerly ascribed to *Lygosoma* have been recently redistributed between *Dravidoseps*, *Riopa* and *Subdoluseps* (Freitas et al., 2021; Agarwal et al., 2024). Of these species, *R. albopunctata* (Gray, 1846), *R. guentheri* (Peters, 1879), *Riopa punctata* (Gmelin, 1799), *Subdoluseps bowringi* (Günther, 1864), *D. goaensis* (Sharma, 1976), *D. nilgiriensis* (Ganesh et al., 2021) and *D. pruthi* (Sharma, 1977), as well as the five new *Dravidoseps* species described by Agarwal et al. (2024), are pendadactyle on both front and hind limbs, *R. lineata* (Gray, 1839) is tetradactyle on both front and hind limbs, and *Riopa vosmaeri* (Gray, 1839) has pentadactyle front limbs and tetradactyle hind limbs. There are three other elongate burrowing skink genera of India. *Barkudia* and *Sepsophis* lack limbs or have only a trace of a front limb lacking digits, while the single Indian species of *Ophiomorus* is tridactyle. All other Indian skinks other than *Ristella* are pendadactyle on front and hind limbs. Hence, it can be concluded, if the species is from India, that the type of *Ristella rurkii* was a member of what is currently called *Ristella*, or that it was an abnormal specimen with loss of one digit on the front limb of one of the pentadactyle lygosomins. A similar case of an anomalous specimen was recorded with one of the Australian *Lerista* species, where the holotype of *Lygosoma goerlingi* Ahl, 1935, described as having two fingers on the front limb, is a specimen of the tridactyle *Lerista timida* with damage to both front limbs, lacking the manus on one side, and having only two fingers on the other (Shea, 1991).

It is important to remember that the subsequent application of the name *Ristella rurkii* to the species now known by

that name was made without reference to the type. The first mention of the species subsequent to the brief accounts of Gray (1839, 1844, 1845) is the mention of the discovery of a new species of *Ristella* by Beddome, reported by Stoliczka (1871), who noted in an abstract that the new species was to be named *Ristella malabarica* (a nomen nudum). Beddome (1870) described *Ateuchosaurus travancoricus*, from specimens from "Travancore Hills, Wynad, and the Anamallays up to 5000 feet", and redescribed the species the following year Beddome (1871) as *Ristella travancorica*, noting that the species was common in the "moist jungles" of the Western Ghats between 2000 and 5000 feet. However, while his original description reported the body scales to be bicarinate, Beddome's redescription noted that his material showed variation in the scale carination, from completely smooth to strongly bicarinate, suggesting that by 1871, his collections included more than one species under the name *travancorica*. In the formal publication of the full paper from Stoliczka (1872), he claimed to have advised Beddome that the species was a *Ristella*, and further redefined the genus, noting for the first time the retractile claws of the genus. Stoliczka's redefinition was based on a specimen of *R. travancorica* given to him by Beddome. However, Stoliczka also noted that he was unsure that *travancorica* was distinct from *rurkii*, stating "at least it is impossible to identify both from the short description given of *R. Rurkii*...". Stoliczka's specimen was described as having bicarinate scales, a distinct pair of widely separated prefrontals (using the old terminology of postfrontals for the prefrontals, prefrontal for the frontonasal, and vertical for the frontal), 26 midbody scales, and 36 scales between fore and hind limbs, and hence is likely to be *R. travancorica* on current definitions of that species.

Beddome donated other *Ristella* specimens to the British Museum. These were registered, and presumably received, as three batches. In the first collection were 17 specimens, presented by Beddome as types of *R. travancorica*, and bearing just the locality Western Ghats (originally registered as 74.4.29.435–451, now reregistered as 1946.8.2.55–71) and a further five specimens, also considered part of the type series of *R. travancorica*, with locality Toracada Valley, Anamallays, 4000–5000ft (originally registered as 74.4.29.1328–1331, now reregistered as 1946.8.15.64–68). Beddome's next *Ristella* was a single specimen from Madura, Sirimallay Hills (now Madurai, Sirumallai Hills, Tamil Nadu state) registered as 80.11.24.5 (reregistered as 1946.8.18.91), and his final donations were a further eight specimens from the same locality (original registration numbers 82.5.22.133–141, reregistered as 1946.8.18.92–99) along with 11 specimens from Sharavati River, North Kanara, registered as 82.5.22.142–152. Boulenger (1887), the first to report on these new specimens, described two new species, *R. guentheri* based on the specimens from Madurai and *R. beddomei* based on the Sharavati River specimens, but also (like Günther, 1875), reidentified the Toracada Valley specimens as *R. rurkii*, the first assignment of this name to specific specimens since Gray's original descriptions.

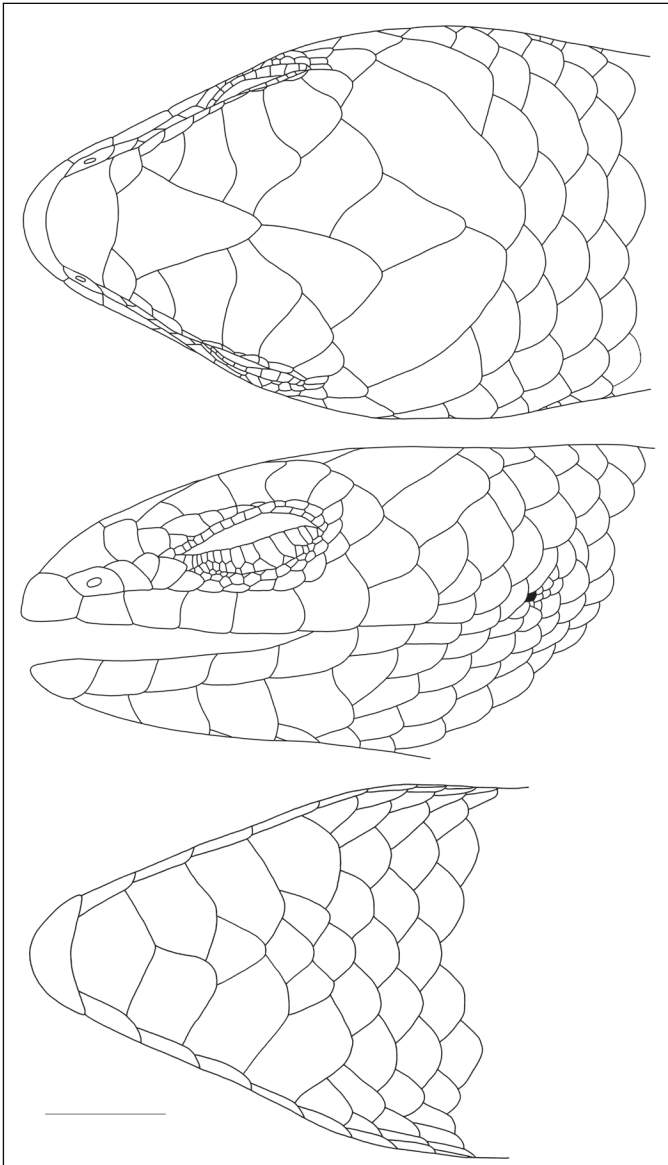


Fig. 4. Dorsal, left lateral and ventral views of the head scalation of the neotype of *Ristella rurkii* Gray, 1839, BMNH 1946.8.15.67. Scale bar = 2 mm.

Ganesh (2018) listed the five specimens from Toracada Valley (BMNH 1946.8.15.64–68) as types of *Ristella rurkii*. However, as noted by Boulenger (1887), these five specimens are part of the type series of *Ristella travancorica* Beddome 1870, and represent misidentified specimens of *Ristella rurkii* among the types of *R. travancorica*, rather than being types of *R. rurkii* itself. Beddome, the donor of the specimens, was just 8 years old and still at school in England at the time of description of *R. rurkii* (Adler, 2007).

Given the discrepancy between the nominal type locality and the known distribution of *Ristella rurkii*, the poor original description, and the uncertainty as to whether the description fits the species to which the name is applied, a neotype is required to fix the name to a specific taxon due to the loss of the original holotype. With *Ristella rurkii* being the type spe-

cies of the genus, it is even more important to fix the name to a species. It would seem to be most appropriate to designate one of the specimens that has incorrectly been considered an original syntype, and which has provided the basis for subsequent definitions of the species. Hence, I designate BMNH 74.4.29.1330, now reregistered as 1946.8.15.67, from Toracada Valley, Annamallays, collected by Richard Beddome, as neotype (Figs. 4,5). The given locality has been subsequently identified as Thorakadavu near Aliyar in Anaimalai (Ganesh, 2018), although others have failed to locate a place by that name near Aliyar (A. Ghosh, A. Datta-Roy, pers. comm.).

Seven criteria are required to be fulfilled for valid neotype designation under the Code of Zoological Nomenclature (Article 75.3):

- 75.3.1. a statement that it is designated with the express purpose of clarifying the taxonomic status or the type locality of a nominal taxon;
- 75.3.2. a statement of the characters that the author regards as differentiating from other taxa the nominal species-group taxon for which the neotype is designated, or a bibliographic reference to such a statement;
- 75.3.3. data and description sufficient to ensure recognition of the specimen designated;
- 75.3.4. the author's reasons for believing the name-bearing type specimen(s) (i.e. holotype, or lectotype, or all syntypes, or prior neotype) to be lost or destroyed, and the steps that had been taken to trace it or them;
- 75.3.5. evidence that the neotype is consistent with what is known of the former name-bearing type from the original description and from other sources; however, a neotype may be based on a different sex or life stage, if necessary or desirable to secure stability of nomenclature;
- 75.3.6. evidence that the neotype came as nearly as practicable from the original type locality and, where relevant, from the same geological horizon or host species as the original name-bearing type;
- 75.3.7. a statement that the neotype is, or immediately upon publication has become, the property of a recognized scientific or educational institution, cited by name, that maintains a research collection, with proper facilities for preserving name-bearing types, and that makes them accessible for study.

Of these, the first and last have already been covered. To fulfil the second criterion, I refer to Boulenger (1887) and Deuti et al. (2020), noting that the neotype possesses the diagnostic character state combination of retractile claws, small ear opening, prefrontals present and widely separated, and dorsal body scales very slightly carinate. The photograph and illustration of the head shields of the neotype, along with the registration tag, are sufficient to ensure recognition of the specimen. As previously noted, the Fort Pitt Museum collection is lost, and it is likely that the holotype was lost early on,



Fig. 5. Neotype of *Ristella rurkii* Gray, 1839, BMNH 1946.8.15.67, in left dorsolateral view.

as the published listing of the reptile collection (Anon, 1843) lacks any mention of the species. Indeed, it is apparent that there was significant loss of the reptiles in the collection by that date, as earlier listings of reptile specimens report additions of 120 specimens in the year to May 1832, of another 76 specimens in the following year, giving at the latter date 421 reptile specimens out of a total of 3864 zoological specimens in the collection (Anon, 1832, 1833). By 1838 (Burton, 1838), the zoology collection had grown to 9386. If the reptiles made up a similar proportion of the collection as in 1832 and 1833, the reptiles would have been of the order of 1,000 specimens (Shea, 2024). Yet by 1843, only 262 reptile and amphibian species are listed as present (Anon, 1843), and most of the reptile species described from material in the Fort Pitt Museum are absent from that catalogue. Fulfilling criterion 5, the original description lacks sufficient data to clearly identify the species, but the neotype is one of the specimens that has been subsequently used to characterise the species (Boulenger, 1887). As noted previously, the given type locality does not match the distribution of the species to which the name has consistently been applied, and hence it is not possible to designate a neotype from the type locality (“North India”). Instead, the neotype is from the northern end of the limited distribution of *Ristella rurkii* (thus, “as nearly as is practicable from the original type locality”; criterion 6).

Sadly, having died in 1837, Burke never knew about the lizard named for him in 1839, and as there is no evidence within the original description (Gray, 1839) for an error in creation of the name, there is no scope under the Code of Zoological Nomenclature to emend the name (Article 32.5).

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